

Monsters Lead Us Home by RunningWolves

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Hurt-Comfort, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, OC, Steve H.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-11-17 11:23:01

Updated: 2019-07-20 13:03:51

Packaged: 2019-12-12 19:05:03

Rating: T

Chapters: 6

Words: 13,941

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: The Heroes of Hawkins thought that they had saved their town and the world when Eleven sealed the Gate. What they couldn't know was that Eleven had inadvertently triggered a distress call that was heard around the globe. Now, strangers are arriving in Hawkins, all with a hidden agenda. Once again the small town becomes the battleground for good and evil.

1. Prologue

PROLOGUE

HAWKINS, INDIANA.

The metal wires groaned under the weight of the people in the cage. There was a breeze rushing up through the miles of cavernous tunnels that ran underneath the town of Hawkins, Indiana. Police Chief Hopper pushed all thoughts of the supporting wires snapping, leaving him and the child beside him to fall to their deaths, out of his mind forcefully.

Hopper snuck a look at Eleven and snorted. *She could probably survive the fall. Fly away or something like that...* he thought to himself as he stared at the young girl. A feeling of paternal concern flooded through him as he remembered what they had come down here to do. After having his biological daughter taken away from him in a cruel twist of fate, Hopper had never dreamed that he would once again be filling the role of father, especially not to remarkable child who had the ability to snap a grown man's neck with a jerk of her head.

The cage stopped its descent, and Hopper pulled his eyes up to look at their enemy. Even being in the vicinity of the gaping wound, that was the cause of so much pain and death, made his skin crawl and his instincts scream at him to flee. He had to work to suppress the urge to scoop his tiny companion up in his arms and climb back the way they came.

"I can do this." Eleven said, sensing in the Police Chief his warring emotions. Although she had spoken to calm Hopper, she found that her words had an effect on her too. *I can do this.* She repeated to herself silently, letting the mantra fill her head until it was her only thought.

"I know you can, kid. Give 'em hell." Hopper responded, pulling the safety latch on the assault rifle and aiming it down the cavern. Nothing that came up that tunnel would lay one finger, claw, hoof, or hook on Eleven whilst Jim was around.

Eleven raised her hand in front of her, taking a slow, steady breath. She was the reason that the world had this hole in it, the reason that the monsters had managed to gain such a dramatic foothold in this plane of existence, and she would be the one to stop it.

She could feel her telekinetic energies reaching out beyond her physical being. She aimed them towards the tear in the wall, the gateway through which the monsters had emerged, and she slowly began to pull the edges together.

In the back of her mind she could hear the growls and barking of the Demodogs that had been alerted to the presence of the people hanging precariously in the metal cage, but she couldn't worry about that now. She knew Hopper was more than capable of protecting her back, and she had bigger fish to fry. Eleven gritted her teeth, she could feel the blood pulsing through her veins as her muscles screamed in protest at the exertion. She pulled harder and harder, forcing the two sides of the Gate together meter by meter.

I can do this.

A gunshot rang out, the sound echoing around the chasm. Another shot, followed by another. They were under attack, and Eleven couldn't help unless she sealed the Gate for good.

She exerted more force, more than she had used in a very long time, but it wasn't enough. She could feel the resistance from the wound ripping apart seam by seam and it felt like she was going to be overpowered. The hideous titan that waited beyond the veil had been drawn to the event and Eleven felt her blood run cold.

I can do this! She almost screamed at herself. In that moment her life flashed before her eyes. The very few years that she had been on this planet had been fraught with pain, torment, hopelessness, abandonment... but not anymore. She had something to live for now. People to fight for.

She hadn't realised that she was screaming until the sound was already out. In that scream, she released all of her pent-up rage and frustrations about her life, all the things she had been clinging to as a

survival mechanism. Eleven felt herself lift from the ground, but she was lost in the throes of her powers. She had never channelled this much before. She felt like a God amongst men. Faces of those who had harmed her flashed in her mind, with Brenner's face featuring the most.

She unleashed her power directly at the Gate, not caring about anything other than sealing it forever. In moments, it was done.

The wound had closed, trapping the monstrosities that lurked in the Upside Down forever. She tumbled to the floor but was caught in Hopper's strong arms before she made contact.

"You did it, kid! You did it!" He exclaimed, hugging her to his chest.

"I did it..." she whispered back.

SURREY, ENGLAND

Evie awoke with a start. Her heart racing, she realised she was panting and covered in sweat. However, that wasn't the main issue. She shot out of bed and ran to the bathroom, flicking on the light and running the cold tap. Without hesitating, she thrust her arm under the icy water and breathed a sigh of relief.

The burning sensation was so strong, it radiated through her entire body, but Evie knew the origin. Once she had eased the pain enough to think straight, she pulled her arm away and lifted it towards the light to inspect it. Everything seemed to be normal. Her eyes lingered on the tattoo that had been given to her before she was even old enough to talk and her teeth clamped together.

001

It didn't matter where she had run to, she would always carry that brand.

It took a few moments for her brain to start functioning properly. Her tattoo still hurt, but she now knew the meaning. It was a signal. A beacon, calling her back to the place she had vowed never to return.

For a brief moment, she thought about just ignoring it and returning

to the life she had built in England, but truthfully, she knew she couldn't.

If she had felt it, then the others must have done too.

2. Chapter One

CHAPTER ONE

"You hear a laugh coming from behind you, but when you turn to look, there is nothing there..." Mike said, his voice trying hard to sound ominous.

"I roll a perception check to see if there's anything I can see!" Will stated, picking up his die and rolling it onto the table. "With my advantage, that makes fourteen."

Mike scoffed, "You see nothing. The sound draws closer..."

"Oh man, if this thing gets a sneak attack on us, we're dead! I knew we should've rested before exploring this cave!" Lucas moaned, knowing that his Knight would only be able to sustain a couple more assaults.

"This is so lame." Max said, peering at the board with little interest. Both her and El had come over to Wheeler house so that they could watch a game and be formally inducted into the party. Dustin had protested when Lucas first suggested the girls join, but not because of their gender. It was against D&D etiquette to write more players in during a campaign. They had come to a compromise that the girls would observe them until they had succeeded in the campaign, and then they would start fresh with the extra players. Max wasn't entirely sure that she wanted to join, but she did want to spend more time with Lucas and when he spent ten hours at a time playing the game, she realised that it would be better for her to at least feign interest.

Max looked at Eleven, who was sat next to Mike. Her expression was one of utter concentration. Unlike Max, it seemed that El truly wanted to learn the rules and play. It had taken several attempts for Max to make El see that she wasn't trying to replace her in the group, and that she had never had an interest in Mike. Even now, their friendship was somewhat rocky and after seeing the things that El could do, Max didn't want to offend her in anyway.

Several hours later, the campaign came to a close. Two of the party members had been on the brink of death from the surprise attack from a Death Tyrant, an undead Beholder whose eye rays could obliterate parties with ease. Luckily, the group recovered and managed to hold their own until they had claimed victory. The boys had hooted and hollered so loudly when the aberration was felled, that Mrs Wheeler had opened the basement door and yelled for quiet. Not too long after that, the kids had found themselves politely removed from the Wheeler house and on their way home.

The boys climbed onto their bikes, whilst Max kicked up her skateboard. Eleven hopped on the back of Will's bike as she was going to his house. Hopper had started having dinner frequently at the Byers' residence, something that El didn't quite understand. She had found Joyce's cooking to leave something to be desired, but she did enjoy the kind woman's company. At first, the way Joyce had been so caring and gentle to El had been confusing, but once she learned that that was just how Joyce was, it became more bearable. After a while, El began to crave the motherly attention that Joyce provided.

"Mom, we're home!" Will yelled as he and Eleven entered the house. After everything Will and the Byers family had been through, Joyce had developed some separation anxiety and she liked Will to announce when he returned home.

"We're in the kitchen, sweetie. You guys are just in time for dessert!" Joyce called back.

Eleven sniffed the air, her curiosity piqued when the word dessert was mentioned. The delicious scent of melted chocolate greeted her, and she rushed towards the smell, with Will hot on her heels.

"Hey, kid. You have fun tonight?" Hopper greeted Eleven, ruffling her mess of thick, brown curls.

"Yea." She replied with a little smile.

It had taken many conversations between Hopper and Eleven before they had managed to reach some sort of compromise about her leaving the house. Hopper was still sure that somewhere out there,

Brenner was lurking in the darkness waiting to snatch his prodigy back, but after he had seen what El was capable of when she shut the Gate to the Upside Down, his arguments about her safety had lost a lot of their weight.

Now, they had worked out a schedule of sorts that meant she could leave the house with her friends so long as she stuck to a rigid set of ground rules. Eleven had agreed to them flippantly, but Mike who had been there for the final discussion had been more serious. Hopper knew that Mike wouldn't want anything bad to happen to Eleven again, and that gave him a small sense of peace.

The phone rang, and Joyce stood to answer it. After a moment, she held it out to Hopper with a questioning look.

"It's the station." She said simply.

"Huh. Wonder what they want at this time..." Hopper replied, taking the phone from Joyce and trying to ignore how his heart beat a little harder when their skin touched.

"This is the Chief," Hopper grunted into the phone.

"Jim, I'm sorry to interrupt, but we just got a call in from the Gas-n-Sip down on Keyes, they said that someone went crazy and set themselves on fire."

"*What?*"

"Neil Barker from the repair shop across the road called it in. He said that this man pulled up in the middle of the station, got out his vehicle, stripped his clothes off, clucked like a chicken, and then.... Doused himself in petrol..."

"God. Okay, I'm on my way to the scene. Is Powell there? Have him set up a wide perimeter and I'll be there as soon as I can."

Hopper hung up the phone and stared at the wall for a moment. After the exposition of Hawkins Lab and the subsequent media frenzy, the town had been peaceful. It had been two weeks since the funeral of Barb and although it had seemed that normality would never return, once the vans of reporters had left the area, the town settled back

into the sleepy status that had been previously shattered.

"Hop, what's going on?" Joyce asked, her voice tight with worry. Hopper knew that she had had a hard time believing that things were going to be okay, and it seemed like she was constantly waiting for the other shoe to drop.

"It's nothing, really. Just a little trouble down at the gas station. I'm gonna swing by and check it out, but would you mind watching El while I'm gone? Just stick the TV on and she'll be as quiet as a mouse." Hopper shot a wink at Eleven.

"Yeah, of course. She can stay the night, no problem." Joyce said, her hand tenderly resting on the young girl's shoulder.

"Nah, I'll be back. I'll be back..." Hopper said, distracted. He rushed out of the door after yelling goodbye and climbed in his truck. With the lights flashing and the siren blaring, he raced towards the grisly scene.

At school the next day, the party were waiting for the first bell to ring and signal the start of their lessons. As usual, the four boys were leaning across their tables towards each other as they gave each other a basic run down of their nights. The gossip had been quiet for the past couple of weeks, but today, both Dustin and Will were eager to share their news.

Will had gone first, winning a quick game of rock-paper-scissors and earning the right to speak. He gave the guys a recap of what he had overheard his mom and Hopper talking about, including how a man had killed himself. The boys were equal parts horrified and intrigued by such a macabre story, and Max who was forced to stay at the back of the class could barely conceal her curiosity. She knew that the boys would tell her at first break, but she hated missing out on the initial impact of a good story.

After Will had finished his tale and the boys had had long enough to process it and react, they turned to Dustin, hoping for more gore.

"I saw a light on at the lab last night on my way home from Mike's."

Dustin announced.

"Dude, you know we're not supposed to go anywhere near that place!" Mike hissed, trying to keep his voice low.

"Yeah, besides, why would you *want* to go near it?!" Lucas added, his face crumbling into a frown. For all he cared, they could knock the lab down and he would sleep easier at night.

"I like to keep an eye on things. If we're the protectors of the town, then we need to remain vigilant!" Dustin said, defending his actions.

"There's nothing to protect against! El closed the Gate and all the freaky science guys left! What you saw was probably the reflection of the moon or something..." Mike said, rationalising. He wasn't angry that Dustin had been to the lab, but he was a little disappointed that Dustin's story wasn't as good as Will's had been,

"What do you think, Will?" Dustin asked, his eyes hopeful that the most thoughtful member of the group would side with him.

"Uh, I don't know..." Will began, looking around to make sure no one was listening to their hushed conversation. "What kind of light?"

"Oh, come on! Surely you don't believe him?" Lucas said.

"It was like a flashlight or something. I'm telling you, someone was in that lab last night!"

"I dunno..." Will said again, unwilling to get in the middle of anything, but also not wanting to believe that someone was still there. "If there was a person there, then what does that mean?"

"It means... we keep an eye on the place. Do a bit of recon every now and then, and if we see something suspicious, we tell Hopper right away. Deal?" Mike said, looking each party member in the eyes.

They all nodded. "Deal."

The day passed in a blur of science, history, and math, and when the final bell rang through the halls, a collective sigh of relief echoed round the school.

Dustin, Mike, Will, Lucas, and Max made their way through the hallways and out into the fresh air. They were stood on the grass talking about their plans for the upcoming weekend, when they were interrupted by a male voice.

"Are you sure this is him?" The voice asked, catching the groups attention.

Standing a couple of feet away from the group were two people holding hands. One was a male, and the other female, but they were identical in height. Their shocking red hair and piercing blue eyes instantly let everyone know that they were twins. Even their clothes were similar.

"Yes, brother. That one is tainted. He's been to the other side." The girl replied, her tone deadpan and her expression neutral. "The children here think of him as a zombie."

Will shrunk back under the intensity of the twins' stares, but Mike felt a spark of irritation.

"Who the hell are you?!" He called to them, clenching his hands into fists. The flame haired strangers were clearly a few years older than him, but he would never let anyone make his best friend afraid.

"This one thinks himself a warrior..." The female said, a hint of humour leaking into her voice.

"We shall see." The male replied and in unison, both strangers took a step towards the boys.

"*We got a problem here?*" A new voice asked, coming up behind the children. Dustin peered back, hesitant to take his eyes off the threatening twins. He relaxed instantly when he saw Steve Harrington march right up to them and plant his feet, putting his hands on his hips.

"I said, do we got a problem?" Steve questioned once more, his gaze flicking between the girl and the boy in front of him. They looked to be not too far off his age, and to him that meant that he was free to throw a punch if need be. The events of the past few weeks had

solidified a previously unwanted bond between himself and the kids, and with most of the adults oblivious to the strange things that happened in Hawkins, Steve had taken it upon himself to watch out for them.

The twins smiled, it was unsettling how their muscles seemed to be completely in sync. Steve squared his shoulders, making it very clear that he wasn't moving until they had left.

"Come, sister. There will be time for this later." The male said.

With one final look at Will, who was trying his best to appear brave, they turned and walked away from the school and down the street.

Steve let out a sigh of relief. He didn't want to get busted for fighting outside the school, but he wasn't going to let anyone hassle his little geeks. He turned to them and rolled his eyes when he saw Dustin's huge, appreciative grin.

"You guys okay?"

"Thanks to you!" Lucas said, feeling grateful that Dustin had forced Steve into the group last month.

"Who were those guys? I've never seen them around school before..."

"Who they are doesn't matter," Mike interrupted. "Did you guys see what I saw?"

Dustin nodded, "Tattoos."

STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK

Evie walked through the snow, grateful to be on solid land once more. The ferry from Liverpool to New York had taken much longer than she had anticipated, and she knew that the wheel of fate had been set in motion long before she could reach her destination.

She rounded a corner, and saw what she was looking for. After docking, the first thing Evie did was find some decent food and stock up on supplies, and once her basic needs were under control, she had begun to look for a bus terminal.

Evie looked at the departures board and breathed a sigh of relief when she saw that luck was finally on her side. She scrounged around in her pocket for as many dollars as she could muster and headed towards the main desk.

"Where to?" The woman asked, her tone betraying how utterly bored she was stuck behind her desk all day every day.

Evie checked the bus times once more and smiled.

"Indiana. Hawkins, Indiana."

3. Chapter Two

Chapter Two

Hawkins Police Chief Jim Hopper sat behind his desk staring blankly at the files that were scattered in front of him. It was Sunday, and despite the fact that he had promised El that they would spend the day together, he had found himself called into the station after another member of the community had committed suicide in a horrifying manner.

That made three in three days.

When he had pulled up to the gas station a couple of days ago, he had faced one of the most horrific scenes he had ever witnessed in his long and tumultuous life. Even though Flo, the receptionist at the station had told him what had happened, and Powell had pulled him to one side when he first arrived to brief him, it was still not enough to stop Hopper from retching with horror and disgust when he saw the scene with his own eyes.

Hopper had had nightmares that night of being trapped in a small cage whilst an unknown person poured gasoline over him. He awoke yelling when the person in his dream dropped a lighter into the gasoline and Hopper was set ablaze. Eleven had come rushing in, so sure that they were under attack and it had taken him over an hour to calm himself and her down enough that they could go back to sleep.

The next day, the station had rung to tell him of another suicide where a man had entered the local store, walking straight to the cleaning products aisle, grabbed the bleach from the shelf, went to the till to pay and when he had payed, he popped the lid and drank the entire bottle. When Hopper had arrived at the scene, the body was lying in a pool of blood that they had choked up before they finally died, screaming and gurgling in agony. Again, Hopper had struggled to sleep that night.

This morning however, the sun was shining brightly for mid-winter, and he and Eleven had pulled on their walking boots to get some

fresh air. He knew how much she hated being stuck inside so often, so every Sunday, they walked through the woods, exploring anywhere and everywhere. Last Sunday, El had spotted a rabbit dashing through the fallen leaves and her eyes had lit up. They had decided then and there that they would see if they could track rabbits in the woods and see how many they could find, something that Eleven was very much looking forward to.

They had almost been out of the door when the phone rang again. Hopper had looked at it, hesitating. It was Eleven that had convinced him to answer.

"It's important." She had said, knowing things that only she could know.

Hopper had sighed and picked up the phone. Yet again, it was Flo, and before he knew it, he was back in his office staring grimly at the photos from the scene and wondering why someone would willingly feed themselves into a woodchipper.

That made three suicides in three days. Hopper knew that something wasn't right, but he couldn't put his finger on it. He had run background checks on all the victims, and aside from being middle-aged men, they had nothing in common that could tie them together. It was like he was missing a vital piece of the puzzle that would make everything clear, but he knew he wasn't going to get that answer anytime soon. Hopper had expected a couple of calls about people doing stupid things, he always did around the holidays when loneliness tended to get the better of people, but in all his years as Chief of Hawkins Police, he had only seen two suicides, and now he was dealing with one a day.

Hopper glanced at the clock and felt the weight of guilt settle around him. He knew that Eleven had understood why he had to leave, but he also knew just how excited she was about looking for rabbits, and maybe even a deer or two. Given her incredible abilities, it was difficult sometimes to remember that she was just a little girl. With a sigh of resignation, he picked up the phone and dialed the cabin where Eleven and he were still living until it was safe to bring her into town.

She answered on the third ring, but just as he had instructed, she said nothing and waited for him to announce himself.

"Hey, kid. It's me. I'm just calling to check in, I know it's getting late." Hopper said apologetically. He vividly remembered the last time he had forgotten to call and check in and how it had taken days to pick up all the glass pieces from her psychically enhanced tantrum...

"It's okay," Eleven replied. Hopper spent a couple of seconds analysing the tone in her words. Because she had never been taught much as a child, it sometimes made communication hard. El had gotten used to living with few words, but Hopper was someone who liked to vocalise everything he thought, so it had proven to be a source of contention for them both. When he was sure that she wasn't angry, or that he wouldn't be going home to another wrecked house, he continued.

"You watching a movie? It sure was nice of Joyce to give us those tapes, huh."

"No movie, Mike is here." She replied.

Hopper felt the blood rush to his face. He stood up out of irritation but worked to keep his voice calm.

"Mike, huh? How... how long has he been there? You know the deal on having guests over, kid." Hopper said. He didn't want to sound like a disapproving parent, but the idea that his adopted daughter was home alone with a boy was enough to make any sane person's blood pressure skyrocket.

"Since nine-two-four." El replied, listing the time in the only way she knew how. Hopper had tried to explain it to her properly, but she didn't see the point in learning it again when everyone knew what she meant in the first place.

"Oh... that's quite a while..." Hopper said, looking at the clock again. It was gone four now. "Well... I won't be long."

"Okay," She replied then hung up the phone.

Hopper stared at the receiver in disbelief. He knew that she wasn't

being rude or sneaky, and he also knew that if there was any kid in the world he could trust, it was Mike Wheeler, but those facts didn't make him feel any better.

He huffed, scooped the pictures off the desk and stuffed them into a bag, and then left the station.

Elsewhere, Dustin and Will were enjoying a long bike ride through the town, making the most of the nice weather. Although it was an almost perfect day, Dustin still had cause to moan.

"I'm just saying, I think it's lame that two of our party members have been brainwashed by chicks!" Dustin told Will.

"You're just jealous that no-one wants to date you," Will replied, laughing easily. It felt nice for him to not have any worries.

"Uh, excuse me. Did you not see Nancy and I at the dance? She's totally into me..." Dustin said, his confidence infallible.

"She danced with you once 'cos no-one else would."

"No way, she wants me, man. I can tell."

"Sure. Besides, need I remind you that both Max and El have saved our lives before? You should be happy that they're in the group!"

Dustin rolled his eyes and pedalled harder, initiating a race between the two friends. They laughed freely as they sped down the long winding road that cut through the town. When they reached the familiar spot where the road split in two, they both paused. It was here, not too long ago, where Will had first encountered the Demogorgon.

"Want me to bike home with you?" Dustin offered, knowing that his friend still had so much fear in him.

"Nah, it's not too far, and Mom said that she'll wait for me on the porch. I gotta get used to doing stuff by myself again, you know?"

"I get it," Dustin replied. "See you tomorrow?"

"Yeah," Will smiled and waved before he rode off. "Catch you later!"

Dustin watched and waited until Will was out of sight, and then began his journey again. He knew that his Mom was expecting him home soon too, but he had one more stop on his travels before he could go back.

Having made the trip almost every day since things had gone down at the lab, he didn't have to think about where he was headed, his hands just naturally steered him that way, and before long he could see the ominous building looming in the distance.

Dustin was absolutely convinced that the light he had seen a few days ago had not been the reflection of the moon, but someone or something walking around. He knew that his friends had made the deal to check it out together, but Dustin couldn't resist. It wasn't much of a diversion on his way home, so it just made sense to him that he would spend a few minutes each day making sure that everything was just right.

He had almost made it to the top of the hill that he had chosen as his vantage point. He had stashed a pair of binoculars and a notebook and pen there for writing down anything that he deemed weird. He settled into the tree line and raised the binoculars to his eyes, searching for anything that seemed to be out of place. It didn't take long for a movement to catch his attention.

Dustin's breath hitched in his throat as icy fear trickled down his spine and chilling him. He adjusted the focus twice just to make sure that he was actually seeing what he thought he was. It was undeniable.

The two red-haired strangers from Friday that had been talking about Will and then threatened Mike were walking out of the lab gates, still hand in hand.

"Oh, man." Dustin whispered to himself. He knew that he had to leave soon if he wanted to make it back home in time for his curfew, but he couldn't peel himself away. He could see through the lenses that the twins were talking to each other, but Dustin couldn't make out what they were saying. His eyes widened when he saw that they

were walking up the hill towards him.

"Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!" He cried, falling backwards into the piles of leaves.

Dustin grabbed his supplies, and his bike and paced further back into the woods, making sure to keep low. He waited with bated breath whilst the twins carried on walking. They didn't pause when they reached near where Dustin was hiding, they just kept walking with their eyes ahead of them. Long after they were gone, Dustin found himself still crouched behind the bush he had been using for cover.

He stood and stretched his legs, sighing when he saw that he was covered in mud.

"Mom is gonna kill me..."

He checked his watch once more and saw that he was late. He weighed his options for a moment, deciding on whether he could handle his mother's anger when he got home late and filthy. After a moment, he had made up his mind. He climbed on his bike one last time and pedalled back the way he came, not in the direction of his house, but towards the house of the Police Chief.

When Dustin arrived, he was panting and slick with sweat. He had ridden as hard and fast as he could, knowing that what he had seen couldn't wait until tomorrow mornings gossip session, and that Hopper needed to know about it right away.

He strode up to the front door, but it opened just before he could knock. It was the Chief, who had a firm hand on Mike's shoulder and was escorting him out of the house. Mike had a sheepish expression, but it turned to confusion when he saw the state of Dustin in front of him.

Hopper saw him too and a curse word slipped from his lips in frustration.

"Another teenage boy on my property... they're like flies around shit, I swear to God..." he muttered to himself as he bemoaned the perils of having a young daughter and all the stress that accompanied it. He

never should have told the boys where the cabin was.

"Chief, I gotta tell you what I just saw!" Dustin yelled, the excitement and fear in his voice sending it through several octaves before he had finished the sentence.

"Dustin, what the hell happened to you?" Mike asked, checking on his friend.

"Wheeler, go home! I'll deal with this..." Hopper said, eyeballing Mike until he had gotten on his bike and left.

"I'll fill you in tomorrow," Dustin whispered as Mike passed by.

"You know, if you see something, you're supposed to call the station. The number is real easy to remember, 9-1-1. You don't need to drop by for a house call." Hopper said, a headache forming from his relentlessly stressful days.

"This isn't anything that the station knows about," Dustin replied, irritated that Hopper didn't seem to be worried.

Hopper sighed and images of the past few days suicides filled his mind. He hoped to God that nothing like that had happened again, but more importantly, he prayed that Dustin hadn't been close enough to see anything as horrific as that.

"I'm listening." Hopper said, steeling himself.

"I saw these two kids coming out of the lab." Dustin announced, confident that the Chief would be able to sort it all out.

"What are you doing going near the lab, you punk!?" Hopper almost yelled.

"I wasn't doing anything! It's on my way home!" Dustin lied. He could tell that the Chief would be angry if he knew the truth. "Anyway, that's not important! It was these two weird kids that we saw yesterday and they're definitely *up to something!* They have tattoos and they're mean and they're weird!"

"Kid, I can't arrest people for tattoos or being dicks..." Hopper said,

exacerbated.

"No, you don't understand!" Dustin said, trying to find the right words to make Hopper see the truth.

"What I do understand, is that your Momma is gonna be freaking out right now. Put your bike in the back of the truck and climb in. I'll take you home."

Dustin sighed. He knew that he didn't have enough evidence to make everyone see the problem yet.

"Besides, kids are always trying to break into the lab these days. Must be some kind of dare..." Hopper said, muttering with frustration.

Dustin didn't reply, he just jumped into the truck and started thinking about what he was going to tell his friends tomorrow.

MEANWHILE

Evie pushed forwards, her eyes working effortlessly in the darkening forest. She needed no map, and no stars to navigate, only the feeling of her tattoo throbbing to show her that she was getting close.

It had been a long journey, one that she had never wanted to start, but one that had needed to be made.

The trees offered her no comfort except for their protective embrace. Still, she pushed on.

Abruptly, her tattoo stopped aching.

Evie paused and looked around her. Even though there were no physical boundaries that she could see, she knew she had made it.

Evie had just crossed into Hawkins.

4. Chapter Three

Chapter Three

Dustin was pacing around the A.V room impatiently awaiting the arrival of his friends. He knew that although Hopper had dismissed him last night, there was something strange happening down at the lab, and he knew that the twins were involved somehow.

The door burst open and Mike, Will, Lucas, and Max tumbled into the room out of breath.

"Where the hell have you guys been?!" Dustin yelled, his voice fraught with stress.

"Chill out man, not all of us have the bladder of a camel, some of us have to pee at the end of the day." Lucas replied, and Max wrinkled her nose at the confession.

"Well, I have news. Major news!" Dustin announced, pulling out his chair and sitting down.

The others looked at each other uneasily before taking their seats.

"This had better be good; some loser beat my score at the arcade, so I've got work to do." Max grumbled, crossing her arms in front of her chest.

"Trust me, it's good."

The others listened in silence as Dustin explained what had happened last night near the lab and how he had seen the twins coming out of the gates. He told them that he had tried to tell Hopper, but the Chief hadn't been concerned, and he didn't want Eleven getting involved in one of their 'dumbass schemes'.

Dustin sat back and relaxed a little, feeling better that he had shared the burden.

"Okay, so what are *we* going to do about it?" Lucas asked. "Five kids against two teenagers that may or may not have freaky powers like

El, I don't like those odds."

"We don't have to fight them..." Will said. "It's not like they're monsters, right? Just...scary."

"They may not be monsters, but I don't think they're the good guys either." Mike replied, speaking for the first time. He closed his eyes to think for a minute, weighing up their options and seeing which was the least suicidal.

After a moment, he spoke again.

"We have to go to the lab and see what they're up to." He declared. His statement was met with cries of disagreement from the others, but Dustin nodded eagerly. "I'm not saying that we have to go into the lab, or confront those weirdos, but Dustin's right, it's our job to keep an eye out for anything that might endanger the town. I think Will should stay at home though..."

"Guys, no way! I'm not leaving you to walk into danger!" Will protested.

"Think about it for a second, man. Those red-haired freaks pointed you out especially! They know about the Upside Down, or at least something to do with it. You should steer clear of them until we know for sure what they want." Mike explained, resting a hand on his best friend's shoulder.

Will sighed. He couldn't argue with the logic, and he knew that he couldn't put his family through any more pain if something bad were to happen to him.

"Fine." Will agreed glumly. "But at the first sign of trouble, you guys have to get the hell out of there. And you have to tell me everything that happens as soon as you can."

When the plan had been settled to some degree, they all stood up and made their way out of the school. Will was heading straight home, where he would sit by his walkie-talkie for the rest of the night, fearing that something bad would happen to his friends that he loved, and that he wouldn't be able to do anything about it. The others were

off home too, but instead of settling down to do their homework, they were gathering their supplies for a long night of secrecy and stealth.

Hours later, under the cover of darkness, the kids snuck out of their houses and headed for their rendezvous point. The air was brisk, and they could see their breath as they spoke. Dustin danced on the spot as he and the others waited for Mike to join them.

"I'm telling ya, we should've brought Steve..." Dustin said wistfully.

"You know that the more people are involved in a recon mission the higher the risk of something going wrong." Lucas stated, although he too wished Steve was able to come along with them.

"His baseball bat would be very useful if we do have to fight those weirdos,"

"Not if they've got powers like El does." Max chimed in, and Dustin sighed.

"Yeah, you've got a point..."

It was at this point that Mike came around the corner, his breath billowing in front of him like a steam train as he charged towards the group. He slowed down his pace a little as he grew nearer, but didn't stop. Instead, the others climbed on their bikes and rushed to join him.

At that time of night, it didn't take them long to reach the lab. They thought that they might have had to stop and hide several times in case they saw someone they knew who would inevitably report it to their parents, but the streets of Hawkins were deserted. It made a couple of them feel better that they were the only ones around, allowing them to move freely and not attract any suspicion, but for the more cynical members of the group, they felt uneasy being the only people outside, as if there were some kind of unspoken curfew on the town.

The kids rode all the way to the fence of the lab and did a long lap of

the perimeter, just to make sure the outside was secure. Once they had done that, they climbed off their bikes and moved to sit inside the security booth, so they could have some shelter and protection from any prying eyes.

"Okay, it all looks good to me. Can we go home now?" Lucas asked, eyeing his watch. It was a school night and if his mom found out that he had snuck out of the house, he would be grounded for life. Or worse, his sister might peek into his room and discover the truth and then rat him out. Lucas shuddered, trying to push the image of his mother's forehead vein dancing in rage as she yelled at him out of his mind.

"I say we go in." Dustin stated, his face neutral and his voice clear and even.

"Are you out of your freakin' mind?!" Lucas replied, not even bothering to keep his voice low.

Mike shushed him, and Lucas glowered. Max placed a calming hand on his shoulder and patted gently. Dustin saw and rolled his eyes, he didn't want to sit here and discuss their options like he knew Mike was going to make them do. He wanted to spring into action and discover the cause behind the lights that he kept seeing in the lab.

"It's too dangerous to go in. You know Hopper would probably arrest us if he knew we were even thinking about it!" Max argued, trying to make the boys see reason. She had seen enough monsters in her short time in the town to never want to do anything dangerous again.

"Yeah, well if Hopper had actually listened to me when I tried to tell him what was going on, we wouldn't have to be here! Do you want our town to be invaded by monsters again? Do you want your families to be in danger? No, I didn't think so. Now, I'm going in. You guys can stay out here and be lookouts if you're too chicken to come with me, but I would appreciate some back up."

Dustin finished his speech and stood up abruptly. He straightened his hat and collected his courage, before marching out of the booth and ducking under the chain-link fence through a hole that had been made by some woodland creature that they had spotted on their

search of the perimeter.

He had almost made it inside the building when he could hear running footsteps behind him. Dustin smiled, and turned to see the faces of his friends approaching, out of breath.

"Glad you could make it." Dustin said, his hand hovering above the door handle.

"Leave no man behind," Lucas huffed, smiling at his friend.

"I thought Hopper said this place was locked up? How are we supposed to get in?" Max asked.

Dustin gave the door a slight pull and it swung open silently. He could hear the breath catch in her throat as she was startled.

"Someone's definitely been coming and going from here, and my money is on the twins. Are we ready?" Dustin asked.

It was normally Mike who led the expeditions and missions, a natural by-product of him being their Dungeon Master, but this time he was happy to take a backseat and let Dustin lead the crew through the lab.

As they entered, Mike looked around, analysing the differences between now and the last time he had been here, with bodies strewn around everywhere and blood dripping from every surface. He knew that at some point in his future, he would probably need considerable therapy, but for the time being he was happy just to suppress his negative feelings.

"The bodies are gone," Mike said. "The blood too. The government must have done a full clean up to avoid any questions."

He walked a little further and stopped, his eyes trained on the ground.

"What's wrong?" One of the group asked, and Mike pointed downwards.

"This is where...Bob..." his voice broke a little. "They took him too..."

"C'mon," Lucas said gently, "we should keep moving."

They glided down the corridors, no one making a sound, and all on the alert for anything that might seem a little out of place. After they had looked through as much of the lab as they could, they turned around and began to make their way towards the exit.

"I can't believe the whole place is unlocked. Security doors, fail-safe locks, all of it. We have to tell Hopper, but I know he'll tell our parents and then we'll be in real deep shit." Mike said with a sigh.

They were almost out of the sterile building when a loud bang caught their attentions. They looked at each other without speaking, almost a decade of friendship and many traumatic experiences allowed them to communicate non-verbally. It took them less than a minute to arm themselves with whatever weapons they had brought along, and soon they were moving back into the lab, towards the source of the sound.

They found themselves descending several flights of stairs, amazing at how well the sound had travelled. They reached a long corridor when there were no more stairs to climb down, and began to walk forwards. There was another bang, this time much closer and they knew that they had come the right way.

The door at the end of the corridor was ajar, and voices could be heard from behind it. They passed through, silently, and found themselves in a control room. When they peered through the windows, none of them could stifle their gasps. Dustin almost yelled out in surprise, but managed to catch himself just before it left his throat.

"The Gate..." Mike whispered, his eyes wide with horror. Eleven had described the giant cavern that held that Gate to the Upside Down to them when she had managed to close it.

"Look! The twins are here!" Max hissed, every instinct in her body screaming at her to run and save herself. She clamped down her muscles to keep her in place, she knew that she was part of a team now and she couldn't leave until they left too.

"They're talking about something..." Lucas said, rummaging around in

his bag for a pair of binoculars. He put them on and looked at the twins again, they were stood right at the edge of the huge hole in the ground, peering downwards and talking to each other, but Lucas couldn't make out any of the words they were speaking.

"What's the plan?" Dustin whispered.

"Leave!" Max said, knowing that they were way over their heads. "Or at least go and get Hopper and El and then come back and confront those weirdos."

Rationally, Mike knew that Max's plan was the most logical, and it had the lowest risk to their lives, even if Hopper would go ballistic when he heard that they had broken into the lab after being expressly forbidden from doing so. He was just about to agree with Max when a strange voice spoke.

"Where's the Tainted One?"

Mike's heart fell to the floor and his body flooded with adrenaline. The twins knew that they were here.

"Run?" Mike mouthed, and the rest nodded eagerly.

"I wouldn't try running if I were you, we'd only catch you. Come, talk to us for a moment." The female voice called out.

Mike watched as the faces of his friends fell in defeat. He took a long, slow, breath and gathered his courage, before standing straight and walking through the connecting door and towards the twins. He could feel the others right behind him, and he was grateful that they were all together.

"You do indeed think yourself a warrior." The male twin said, confirming something he had said when he first met Mike outside of the school. "I am Jason, and this is my sister Janelle."

Mike paused, making sure that his voice was calm and steady before he spoke. "I'm Mike, this is Dustin, Lucas, and Max. What are you doing here? How do you know about this place?"

"The real question is how do *you* know about this place?" Janelle

replied, tilting her head to the side as if she were trying to figure something out.

"Three and Four..." Dustin mumbled, his eyes transfixed on the twin's wrists where their tattoos were visible.

"You know what that means?" Jason asked, his voice darker, and his eyes narrowing. "This is indeed an interesting town. Unfortunately, it seems that you children know too much. We have to deal with you." He took a step forwards, and the kids fell back instinctively, all except Mike who held his ground.

"Our friend is more powerful than you can dream! You don't scare us, we've battled monsters!" Mike said, his voice like iron.

"Alas, your friend is not here..." Janelle replied, a slight smile lingering on her face, it was the first emotion they had seen from her and it chilled them.

"But I am!" A voice called from the darkness behind them.

Mike turned around to see a young woman stepping out of the shadows, walking towards them in long, confident strides. Her black hair was pulled into a pony tail and her face was set in grim determination.

"Number One! You're home!" Jason exclaimed.

"Threatening little kids, really Jason? You haven't changed at all..."

"Ah, but you have. *Evie*." Janelle mocked. "You've forgotten where you came from."

"Believe me, I tried. I should've known you two would be here. I'm warning you...leave...now. Leave town, and I won't come after you." Evie threatened, her expression deadly.

"But if we leave, then what would Kenji think? That's right, he's home too. We'll be a family again soon enough." Jason said, and Evie spat.

"We'll leave... but not without a farewell gift." Janelle sang, and Jason's face split into a grin.

He took another step forward and closed his eyes, when he opened them again, they were completely black.

"NO!" Evie shrieked, breaking into a sprint towards the children.

Jason opened his mouth and whispered, "*Mike Wheeler. Jump to your death.*"

The party laughed as they heard what Jason said, despite his menacing appearance.

"Go to hell," Dustin replied, emboldened by the arrival of their new ally. He turned to look at her as she was still running towards them, and didn't notice that Mike had stepped away from the group.

Without hesitating, Mike leapt forwards into the gaping hole and plummeted into the abyss.

5. Chapter Four

A/N: Hey guys, I'm so sorry for the delayed posting! Life got in the way, but I'm back and raring to go! I hope you like this chapter, your continued support means so much to me!

Chapter Four

The screams echoed around the cavern, reverberating off the walls and bounding back to the origins of the sounds. Dustin felt his entire body go numb, as his last remaining thought was to control the bile in his stomach that threatened to rise up and spew from his mouth. His best friend had just thrown himself to his death, and he was powerless to do anything to stop it. Not even a second had passed, and yet it seemed that time was moving forwards relentlessly. Dustin had no idea how deep the hole in the ground was, but he knew that Mike wouldn't freefall forever. At some point soon, the remaining members of the party would hear the dull thud that signified Mike had reached the bottom, and although they wouldn't be able to hear the accompanying sounds of his bones shattering and his brains exploding, Dustin's imagination was clearly up to the task.

He pulled in a breath. It scratched his throat as he inhaled, knowing that his vocal chords were strained from the screaming. He blinked, time was still passing in juts and jolts, but it was passing nonetheless. Mike is dead. Mike is dead. Mike is dead. The thought kept repeating around his head. Guilt threatened to drown him. If only they'd stayed outside where it was safe, Mike would be alive. Mike is dead. Mike is dead.

Dustin heard Lucas gasp and it snapped him out of his trance. He took in the scene in front of him. The girl, the stranger who had appeared from nowhere a moment ago had run straight past the kids. At first, Dustin thought she was charging towards the Twins, and he hoped viscerally that she was going to tear them into shreds. Dustin had never actively wanted someone to die before, sure he had wished in vain that the bullies in his school didn't exist, but it was never with the express intention of them being dead, but his blood was singing for vengeance and he had never felt hatred like he felt about the

Twins.

Instead, the girl arced gracefully, her long legs barely making contact with the ground as she strode forwards, giving her the appearance of hovering. Without hesitation, she bent her knee and then sprang forwards, like a leopard striking towards its prey, and she threw herself after Mike, down the chasm.

Janelle giggled, the sound jarring with the situation they had found themselves in.

"Come, brother. I'm sure Kenji will be most eager to hear the news of Number One's return." She said, extending her hand towards Jason, whose eyes had returned to their natural colour.

Jason smirked and entwined his fingers with his sister. "Things are indeed going to be interesting from now on."

Jason shot a wink at the stunned children before they turned silently and ghosted out of the room.

Dustin felt the air nearby almost fizzle as he watched in amazement as a shape materialised in front of him. It took his brain a second to process the image but when he did, he felt his voice shoot through several octaves with excitement.

"Mike! You're alive!" Dustin squealed, throwing himself at his friend and enveloping him into hug.

"What the hell happened? Why did you jump?!" Lucas was also yelling, his relief that his friend was alive finally let him find his voice.

"Is no one going to mention that this chick literally just 'poofed' in front of us like a freaking genie?!" Max questioned, her mouth still ajar at what she had just witnessed.

They could all feel the fear that they had been trying to keep a tight grip on slowly ebb away as they took it in turns to hug Mike and make sure he was okay.

"Seriously, why did I jump? I couldn't stop myself!" Mike finally

spoke, his voice breaking at the last word.

"It's what Jason does, he can plant an idea in your head and make it so that you can't do anything else but obey..." the strange girl spoke once more, explaining.

"Who the hell are you?" the collective asked.

"Evie."

"Number One..." Dustin whispered, his eyes transfixed on her tattoo much like they had been when he'd seen the Twins markings.

"How do you know what this means? Why are you guys here in this place?" Evie asked, her eyes scanning the children in front of her rapidly. Her head tilted to the side as she settled her gaze on Max.

Max felt herself shrinking under the intensity of their mysterious hero's stare. She was just about to blurt out something along the lines of 'what the hell are you staring at?' when Evie blinked twice and looked away.

"You're not her," Evie said, a smile tracing on her face.

"Who?" Max replied, the heat of her blush lighting her cheeks.

"You're talking about El," Mike surmised.

"El... cute." Evie said. "I knew her as Eleven. Other names... were not allowed. Where is she? Is she safe?"

The party looked at one another, unsure of what to say or how to say it. Sure, this girl had saved their lives and made the twins leave but they didn't know her or what she wanted.

"She could be a spy," Lucas muttered under his breath.

Evie let out an easy laugh, the sound was carefree and showed that she took no offense in what Lucas had said.

"I've gotta find a phone somewhere around here. The power is on so hopefully the lines are connected." Mike said. He knew he had to call

Hopper and tell him everything that had happened here, even though he knew they would all be in so much trouble.

As Mike made his way out of the room flanked by Lucas, Evie walked over to the gaping hole in the floor. She could feel the energy radiating from it and she shuddered. She felt someone come and stand by her, but she didn't look up.

"The cause of all this trouble..." Evie said wistfully, a sigh escaping her lips.

"What is it. Like what is it really?" A voice asked. Evie turned and saw a mess of curly hair and a curious face.

"That...is a very long story for a different time. Right now, I have to figure out what I'm going to do about all this mess and how I'm going to fix it..." Evie sighed, and rubbed her forehead to dispel the tension that was steadily forming.

Dustin didn't reply, instead they stood in silence staring at the seemingly never-ending drop in front of them.

A while later, after the boys had returned, they could hear yelling and cursing coming from the hallway that led to the control room where the kids had passed through to get to the chasm. Instinctively, Evie straightened up and raised her hands with her palm outstretched.

"Woah, woah, he's a friend!" Mike called out, recognising Evie's stance from the many times he had seen El go on the offensive.

From the distance, Evie saw a middle-aged man rushing towards the group, a shotgun cocked and aimed in his hands. He took in the scene in front of him, assessing everything the way only an expert could. He was wearing a Sheriff's uniform and from the way the kids relaxed when they saw him, Evie knew he was a person they trusted.

"I swear to God, I am going to start tagging you kids if you don't start obeying my damn orders! What the *hell* are you doing here?! Who is this?" Hopper cursed, jabbing his shotgun in the direction of Evie to point.

"This is Evie, she's like El. She saved us..." Dustin replied, but shrank back under the scrutiny of Hopper's stare.

"He's real mad," Lucas whispered to the group, trying not to feel like they were about to get told off by a teacher.

"You're damn straight I'm mad! You could have been killed!" Hopper yelled, his face slowly changing from a slight pink to a beetroot red as he worked himself up.

"Mike almost was killed, but Evie saved him!" Dustin supplied happily with a shrug, unaware of the silent warnings his friends were giving him.

Hopper's rage caught in his throat and he made a strangled sound as he tried to verbalise his thoughts.

"Mike... are you okay? Are you hurt?" Hopper said eventually, his anger subsiding and turning to concern instead. Even though the kids in front of him were perpetual pains in his ass, they were still his kids.

Mike nodded, "I'm fine. Long story short, I was forced into that hole and would've been killed but Evie jumped in and saved me."

"That story is too short. Who forced you in? How did Evie save you? What were you all doing here in the first place?" Hopper quizzed, exacerbation rife in his voice.

"Evie is special like El. She's 001. She's a teleporter!" Dustin answered. "She's like Nightcrawler except less blue and not a dude!"

Hopper looked at Evie for a moment, and she lifted her arm to show him the tattoo that had been branded on her when she was nothing more than a child. Being in the presence of the Gate had caused it to start burning again, and she desperately wanted to leave and grab a shower and some food.

"Listen, it's been a long day and the kids here have been through enough trauma to last them a while. Is it okay if we head out? I'm sticking around town, I've got business to attend to, so you can ask me any questions you like later." Evie said, her voice calm and

balanced.

"Alright, all of you can get in the back of the truck and I'll drop you home. Evie, if it's alright with you I'd like to talk some more." Hopper replied, using his 'official' voice that implied there was to be no arguing or disputing.

Once everyone was agreed and the bikes and kids were loaded into the Sheriff's truck, they set off for the various homes. The kids were squashed into the backseat as Evie was riding shotgun. They hung forwards eager for information now that they were firmly out of danger and soon to be home.

"How did you know to come to the lab?" Mike asked.

Evie smiled. She had told them that they could ask any question they liked, but she hadn't anticipated them being asked so soon. She wanted to be totally honest with them so that they knew they could trust her. Whatever their involvement in everything was, they were clearly important, so Evie needed to incorporate herself into their inner circle as quickly as she could to prevent the situation escalating any further.

"A while ago, my tattoo starting burning, it was in the middle of the night, but I knew what it meant and what it would mean for the others too, so I had to come back to Hawkins and see for myself. I didn't expect it to take me so long to get here though, or how long the Twins have been here." Evie gritted her teeth, angry that people have no doubt been suffering since the Twins made it to Hawkins and she wasn't there to stop it.

"That was weeks ago! Why did it take you so long?" Dustin asked. "You're a teleporter so why didn't you just... zap yourself here?"

"Our abilities have their limitations. I can't just 'zap' myself anywhere, especially not thousands of miles. I was at home in England at the time. I haven't used my power for over three years, so excuse me for being a little rusty. I still managed to save your friend though! Besides, have you ever tried entered a country like the US without papers or a passport? It's a total nightmare."

"As a Sheriff, I'm gonna pretend I didn't hear that last part..." Hopper mumbled. "So, what's the deal with these Twins? Seems like they're the source of all this hassle."

"Jason and Janelle came to the lab a year or so after I did. 003 and 004." Evie scoffed. "Jason has limited mind control, he can make you do anything he wants, but it does wear off eventually if you're somehow unable to act it out. Janelle is a mind reader, but the last time I saw them, she could only read one mind at a time. I don't know if that's changed, our powers get stronger with age."

Hopper blew a long breath out as he pictured El as a grown woman. If her powers continued to get stronger, then by the time she could vote, she'd be able to destroy cities. He pushed the thought out of his mind and refocused.

"Who's Kenji?" Lucas asked, remembering the name had been spoken a couple of times during their confrontation.

"Kenji... 007. I really didn't expect him to side with the Witch Twins. He was brought in from Japan. He can sense auras and manipulate them. It's difficult to really explain I guess."

"There are eleven of you? Kids from the lab with powers?" Hopper said.

"There were eleven of us. Four are dead now. I was first. Brought in from England when I was three. Then there was Modi from Africa who had precognition, he died."

"Pre...what?" Max asked.

"He could see the future," Dustin explained, remembering the word from one of his books.

"Then numbers three and four are Jason and Janelle – American as you know. Five is Lucille, she can tell if someone is lying. I expect she will be arriving soon. Six was a young American called Sarah, she had True Sight, she's gone too. Seven is Kenji, Eight is Kali from India, who can project her thoughts, Nine was Viktor from Russia who had a whole Jekyll and Hyde thing going on. Ten was Lorenzo

from Italy who had a psychic shield. Viktor and Lorenzo are dead. Then there's Eleven, Jane..."

As Evie listed off her former friends and allies she felt a pang of loss and anger that they were just kids when they were forced from their homes and into the lab to be reduced to nothing more than experiments.

"Jesus. It's an international nightmare..." Hopper said, thinking of the logistics of involving the FBI, Homeland Security, Interpol, and not to mention all the other countries national services like MI5. "Why are they coming to Hawkins? Why now?"

"When the Gate was closed, Eleven tapped into the Collective and channelled all of us. It triggered a beacon that manifests from our tattoos. We're all intricately linked. She's the first one to use the Collective power and even now, the Gate calls to us. I came to make sure it's shut and stays that way. As for the Twins, I don't know what they're planning to do yet, but I intend to find out..."

6. Chapter Five

Chapter Five

The kid's questions faded into silence, leaving Evie alone with her thoughts. She looked out the window, watching the town of Hawkins flow by, and a pit of dread settled firmly in her stomach. She had never wanted to return, she never wanted to see this place, or think about the people here. Once she had suppressed the guilt that she felt about leaving the other children behind in the lab, she was determined to live her life. The lights of the shops and homes blurred into one and Evie felt herself being washed away in the memory of the last time she was in Hawkins.

She had just turned 16. The only way she knew that was because the men that worked in the lab had thrown her a coming of age party. All day they congratulated her on reaching maturity, and all day Evie had lapped it up, so starved for human attention and affection that she was blind to the undertones in the voices as they told her she was a woman now. Jonas, the man who worked with Evie the most often to develop her abilities, told her that they had even got a present for her in her room. Once her day of training and working was over, and they had conducted the tests that they needed to, she rushed back to her room, eager to see what her gift was.

When she opened the door, she saw Dr. Brenner there sat on her bed, a smile slowly creeping across his face. Evie's stomach dropped. No good ever came from Dr. Brenner. She had learned that lesson the hard way several times when she had failed to meet his expectations.

"My little Evie, all grown up." He said to her, patting the space next to him. "Come and sit," he ordered her.

Despite every instinct telling her to run, she complied. She knew what it would mean if she disobeyed him, and she would do anything to avoid being punished again. She slowly lowered herself onto the bed, her heart hammering with fear, but she didn't know why.

Brenner ran a finger down her cheek, and cupped her face in his hand, forcing her to look at him. "Don't worry, I'll be gentle. It will only hurt the first time..." he whispered, and she felt a tear slip from her eye.

The terror that she had felt in that moment was overwhelming. She didn't know then what his words had really meant, but her survival instincts had taken over. Before she realised what was happening, she felt the world around her fizzle and blur, and then she was being ripped into pieces, her body was atomised, and with a loud pop, she disappeared. The next moment, she had air on her face, and dirt beneath her feet. Up until that point, her ability had only been to shift items to her, anything she thought of she could make appear in an instant, but she had never been able to shift herself. She had never even tried. The only thing left to do was run.

The door of the truck slammed as Hopper climbed back in behind the wheel. The sound of it snapped Evie back to the present, and she gasped in surprise.

"Sorry, didn't mean to scare ya." He said gruffly. His mood had soured dramatically after having to drop all the kids off and make sure they got in safely. He felt like a taxi service, except instead of money, the kids paid him with stress.

Hopper looked at Evie, her face was pale and tight, as if she'd just been through something terrifying. He opened his mouth to ask if she was okay, but he saw her collect herself, and the mask of calm that she had been wearing since they had met slipped back into place. Hopper let out a deep breath, instantly recognising the expression as one he saw in the mirror when he awoke from nightmares about his past.

He knew roughly what El had been through in the lab, but the thought had never occurred to him until that moment that the others would have suffered too. If Evie was the first kid in the lab then she would have been suffering for the longest. *God knows what those bastards have put her through*, he thought, adding one more reason to kill Brenner onto his ever-growing list.

"...Must be hard for you to be back here." Hopper said, uncomfortable with the idea of being emotionally empathetic, but also wanting this stranger to know that he understood a little.

Evie just shrugged. "We all do what needs to be done," she replied before lapsing back into silence. She wasn't a naïve 16-year-old anymore who had never seen the outside world. She had lived by herself for three years, had survived and in some ways even thrived.

She would never let Brenner and the rest of them take her freedom from her again. She would kill them before they got the chance to try.

Hopper drove a little while longer, not trying to fill in the silence with chatter. Finally, he pulled to a stop outside the Byers house where Hopper had left El with Joyce at the last minute when he had gotten the call from Mike about being in the lab. El had kicked up such a fuss about being left behind that he thought she was going to trash the house, but Hopper had stayed firm. There was no way in hell he was letting his daughter go anywhere near that place again.

He clambered out of the truck and made his way up to the door, before pausing and checking if Evie was following. He jumped when he saw she was right behind him, having not made a sound as she moved.

"Jesus!" he called out, "remind me to get you a bell."

Evie scoffed and entered the house after Hopper.

"I'm back!" Hop called out, and El, Joyce, and Will all came hurrying into the hallway. All three stopped dead when they saw Evie. Joyce shot Hopper a look of confusion at this stranger in her house, but Hopper held up a finger to pause any questions she might have. His eyes were trained on El, who was stood staring at Evie with wide-eyed confusion. Hopper's hand hovered over his gun, a nervous habit he did whenever he thought a situation might get out of control and he would need to react quickly.

Evie took a step forward and then sunk to her knee, so she wasn't towering over El. She could feel her heart beating nervously, and her eyes began to fill with tears. Evie had never thought that she would see any of the kids again, and her voice cracked as she spoke.

"Hi Jane...El...you got so big..."

El simply looked at her, unsure of who this person was, but unable to deny the feeling of familiarity she felt when looking at her.

Evie smiled gently, before extending her hand with her palm

upwards. With a little effort, an apple popped out of nowhere and rested on her palm. Evie held it and offered it to El. Suddenly El knew exactly who was in front of her. The kids had spent a lot of their lives separated, but they had occasionally been allowed to mingle, and each time, El had been given a beautiful red apple by the oldest there.

El let out a little sob and threw herself into Evie's arms. "You're home! You came back!"

"I never meant to leave you, Eleven, any of you. I swear! Once I was out, I didn't know how to go back and help you. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry!"

Joyce watched the interaction and felt a deep sadness. "I'll go and make some hot cocoa..." she said, before grabbing Hopper's arm and yanking him into the kitchen with her. Hopper cast one last glance at El and saw that she was eagerly introducing Evie to Will and trying her best to explain everything. Hopper sighed as he noted how much collective trauma there was in that room. He didn't have time to elaborate on that thought however, because the second they were in the kitchen, Joyce rounded on him and began demanding answers.

He filled her in to the best of his knowledge, but he knew that there were glaring gaps in his explanations. He would have to call a team meeting soon to collect all the information that everyone knew, but he hoped it could wait until the kids were on school break. Hopper watched Joyce intently as he spoke, and he saw her expression change swiftly from fear, to anger, to sadness, and back again. He marvelled at how it was possible that she fit all of those feelings into her tiny body.

Joyce sighed and let her head fall into her hands. "It's never gonna end, is it?" she asked, her voice rife with stress.

Without thinking, Hopper reached out and pulled Joyce into his arms, feeling her rest her head against his huge chest. He held her tightly until she pulled herself under control, but when she was calmer, neither made a move to pull away. Joyce felt safe and protected surrounded by his bear arms, and Hopper felt a peace he hadn't experienced in years with Joyce leaning against him, as if she

were washing his stress and negativity away.

Will cleared his throat, making his presence known and Joyce and Hopper awkwardly disentangled themselves and tried to act natural.

"We just came to check on the drinks..." Will said, looking at Hopper with the shrewd eyes of a son protecting his mother.

"Right!" Joyce said, her voice a little higher than normal. She turned to grab the drinks but then realised she'd never even started making them. "uh, just a minute, I'll do it."

"It's alright Joyce, it's getting late and I've gotta get El back, and Will has school tomorrow." Hopper said, making his way into the lounge.

He saw Evie sitting on the couch with El curled up in her lap, looking the most peaceful he had ever seen. Even though Hopper and El had been living together for a long time, she had never been overly affectionate. It was something that they both struggled with, so it was surprising to see her so easily at peace with the newcomer.

"C'mon kids, time to go." Hopper announced, and El took Evie's hand, waved goodbye to Joyce and Will, and then headed out to the truck.

"Evie, where are you staying? I'll drop you off." Hopper offered, and he saw a sheepish look cross her face.

"I uh... hadn't actually thought about that..."

It was then that he remembered that she had literally just gotten into town and didn't have a home. One quick glance at the way El was clinging to Evie settled the matter instantly.

"Then you're staying with us."

Evie offered a grateful smile, and Hop felt himself blush. He wasn't just being nice, he knew that El wouldn't want to be separated from Evie, and he didn't want to have to deal with a psychically powered tantrum right now. Plus, Evie knew things that Hopper needed answers to, and it would be better for her to be in a place where Hopper could keep an eye on things.

Once they were back in the truck, El quickly settled back onto Evie's lap, and within minutes she was snoring quietly. Hop felt a gentle tug on his heart, the way that he always felt when he was overcome with paternal love for his new daughter. It was in those minutes of quiet that Hop allowed himself to forget all about superpowers, and government experiments, and saving the world, and he just became a regular dad, caring for his beloved daughter.

Evie let El's slow breaths relax her. It had been a long day, and she'd used her powers more today than she had in years, she was exhausted.

Finally, they pulled to a stop outside of a cabin in the middle of the woods. Evie felt the isolation settle over her like a protective blanket, and she clambered out of the truck, carrying El in her arms.

"Welcome to Hopper's Home for Wayward Superheroes..." Hopper said, chuckling at his own joke.

Evie joined in; the sound of her laughter caused El to stir. Hopper raised his finger to his lips, and she settled back down. He gave Evie a quick tour of the place, which involved the kitchen, lounge, bathroom, and El's room. Hopper took El from Evie and placed her gently in bed, tucking the blankets around her. El woke just long enough to tug Evie down next to her and once more snuggled into her shoulder.

"We'll talk tomorrow, get some sleep." Hopper whispered before shutting the door.

Evie felt herself sigh, she was exhausted but couldn't switch off, so she resigned herself to a night of staring at the ceiling, planning her next move.

MEANWHILE

Jason and Janelle sat in a booth of the Hawkins late night diner, reading the menu with disinterest. They looked up when someone slid into the seat across from them.

"Kenji, how nice of you to join us." Janelle said, her voice neutral.

"Is it true? Is she back?" Kenji asked, cutting to the chase.

"Hi there, you guys ready to order?" a plump waitress with a friendly smile asked.

Jason grimaced at the intrusion. He hated everything about this town, it was boring, and the people were insignificant.

"Yes, we'll have three bacon cheeseburgers all with fries, and cokes. And when you're done, stick your head in the fryer." Jason commanded, and the waitress' eyes widened in fear.

"You got it," she said cheerily, as tears of fear ran freely down her face.

Kenji sighed. "So much for keeping a low profile..." He took hold of the waitress' hand who was visibly shaking, *"you're not afraid, you're happy, you want to do it. You're not afraid."*

He watched as peace settled across her face, and she smiled, before going to make their order.

"If One really is back, perhaps I should pay her a little visit..."

The food was delivered quickly, and as they picked their way through their fries, they heard the screams of the chefs as the waitress plunged her head into the vat of boiling oil.